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While the concept of parent involvement is stressed by almost all programs for preschool children, there is little evidence of parent-focused programs specifically designed to overcome the deficits of the lower class parent. It was the purpose of the present study to develop a program to enhance the functioning of the lower class mother in language style. The lower class mother needs activities designed specifically to increase her confidence and her ability to affect the growth and learning of her child in a socially valued manner. Seven lower class mothers of North Philadelphia were introduced to a program in which they learned to tell stories to their children. In cooperation with the Get Set program, mothers and their preschool children attended sessions in which an attempt was made (by engaging the participation of the mothers in reading and storytelling) to increase the quantity and quality of the mothers' verbalizations and to help the mothers to encourage their children to do so. High-interest preschool-level books were used. The langauge abilities of the mothers and children were measured by a battery of tests. The mothers showed a good deal of interest in the program; and although they were quite limited in education, they clearly increased their language abilities in several respects. (WD)

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LANGUAGE STYLE OF THE LOWER CLASS MOTHER: A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF A THERAPEUTIC TECHNIQUE[1]

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Week 20: Two members of the Mother's
Language Style Group

"When my child asks me to read him a story, I can do it. I feel as though I'm needed. Since I joined this story hour, my little boy_____, he drives his teacher crazy going up there talking about, "Read me a story, read me a story." And he wants me to come into school [Get Set] practically every day to read him a story. And a couple of times I did go to class and read a story to him. He thinks he's a big wheel, his mother can read a story book." [laugh]

"What we're interested in doing is mostly getting out of... what we're considered as, the ghetto. The children who become more interested in things, they find out there's a world opened up to them. So if your children find that you're interested, and [you] read to your children, later on they take it on themselves. This is a start to do better for our children than was done for us. There was nothing for us. I haven't had much education. I went as far as 6th grade in one school. Then I was put in another school. I was placed in a special class which, at that time, didn't give you much interest. I mean, if you figure you're going to stay in a special class and you're not going to move on to another grade, this doesn't stimulate much interest in learning. When I was 16 years old, this one woman took an interest in me and taught me how to read and write. I'm still not much of a reader but I can sort of tell stories. I don't even remember being read to. It was never impressed upon me that books helped you learn about things going on out there. I think if we want to get our children so that they don't want to live just an every day life like we were brought up and we lived, we need to have programs like this. If this went on in each center there wouldn't be a need for a Get Set because there wouldn't be a ghetto. We wouldn't be set apart as a ghetto."

I. Introduction and Background Research

Introduction

It is clearly recognized that the role of the mother has an inordinate impact upon the development of the human infant. It is further realized that the social class of the mother plays a major part in the carrying out of her role (Riessman, F. 1962, Myers, J. K. and Roberts, B. H. 1959, Baldwin, A. 1948, Peterson, D. R. et al 1959, among many others). This paper describes in detail, a study of one aspect of maternal functioning, and the development of a program to enhance that functioning. The aspect selected for study was the language style of the lower-class mother. Language style was selected for study because communication is central to all human development, and previous studies have shown that the lower-class mother is deficient in a number of areas related to the positive development of her children. Frequently, the patterns of interaction between the lower-class parent and child, compared to the middle class, "tend to be antithetical to a child's positive emotional health." (Chilman, 1966, p.29)

There is overwhelming evidence of the adverse impact of the lower-class mother's limited ability to communicate with her children so as to enable them to meet the emotional, social and educational demands of the larger environment. In spite of this evidence, there are few programs designed to enhance this role, and to help her to overcome these limitations. It is as if we have taken literally Bloom's conclusion (1964) that once a characteristic has reached its "complete" or highest development; (i.e., attained adulthood), there is very little that environmental change can do to affect that development.

The recent focus has been on programs for children at increasingly earlier ages with the hope that, whether or not the mother is helpful,

the child will be able to benefit and to overcome previous deficiencies. Little has been done to develop programs to enhance the effectiveness of the lower-class mother. While the child receives more and more assistance outside of the home, the lower-class mother has scant opportun ty to participate in the education of her child. In this area, as in many aspects of her life, the lower-class mother feels powerless to positively affect her life or the lives of her children.

It is not surprising, therefore, that a prevalent life style of many lower-class members has been termed a "poverty syndrome" characterized by emotional depression (Chilman, 1966). This syndrome was also found to occur as a major category of patient problems in an analysis of psychiatric emergency patients from a low-income area (Spivack, 1968). Chilman suggests that "constant and overpowering frustrations [which surround most aspects of the poverty mother's life] make achievement an untenable goal and seriously weaken the ego or self-esteem" of the mothers. A mother who realizes that she lacks the skills necessary to help her child to learn and to achieve success gains the feeling that she is unnecessary. Consequently, she has one more frustration to increase her sense of worthlessness and alienation.

In order to overcome the feeling of alienation most preschool programs in poverty areas have urged mothers to take an active role in the day-to-day classroom activities. However, little attempt is made to prepare the mothers with specific skills that would enable them to take a meaningful role. Instead, they are inserted into classrooms only to find that all they can do is pour juice and take children to the bathroom. While these tasks may aid the teacher, they do not provide sufficient reward for the mothers. Other attempts to involve the mothers in a more meaningful manner often result in frustration because of a lack of skills or preparation. Many of the lower-class

mothers have had such deprived backgrounds that they are incapable of responding effectively to many of the demands of adulthood and parenthood.

One gets a clearer picture of the difficulties lower-class mothers have in any educational context when it is realized that about 75 percent of them have not finished high school and that many have serious emotional problems and severe learning deficits (Burgess et al, 1963). It is improbable that they could be successful in enhancing the education of their children when they have not been prepared for it in their own childhoods.

The fact that the lower-class mother frequently lacks the appropriate skills is the very reason for the need for public preschool programs for her children. While parent involvement, motivation, and enthusiasm are very important assets to enhancing the child's interest and involvement, they do not change the fact that many, if not most, lower-class mothers remain unable to really involve themselves in even the most rudimentary educational preparation for their children.

In the middle-class tradition, almost every preschool program has a PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) in which members discuss such topics as how to help children learn (suggesting ways and means and presuming skills) and how the mother can take part in the school program; (i.e., cake sale, accompanying the children on trips, etc.). The theory is that the mother will gain a positive feeling of being involved from attending such meetings. Little or nothing is usually accomplished in enhancing the mother's functioning.

The lower-class mother in the educational setting is often fearful of being "found out;" (e.g., that she is functionally illiterate or that she has personal problems). The courageous mother will

attempt to "cover" for her lack of ability and experience. However, her same limitations have often resulted in a parent-child interaction characterized by communication unconducive to successful learning (Hertzig et al, 1968). Nevertheless, there is little evidence to suggest that anything specific is being done to assure that this same interaction will not occur in the future.

In short, while the concept of parent involvement is stressed by almost all programs for preschool children, there is little evidence of parent-focused programs specifically designed to overcome some of the deficits of the lower-class parent. Most middle-class parent education programs are designed to help parents to gain a better understanding of their children. To some degree, it appears this model has been retained for use with the lower-class parent. However, insight alone is of slight value without adequate development of communication skills. The nature of the process of communication utilized by the lower-class militates against the use of discussion by many lower-class mothers for problem solving. Furthermore, most individuals raised in poverty and remaining there, do not regularly attend meetings or join groups. This is particularly true when the purpose of the group is to hold discussions.

These findings suggest that the lower-class mother needs activities designed specifically to increase her confidence and ability to affect the growth and learning of her child in a socially valued manner. In creating such a program, the unique characteristics of the mother attempting to raise children in an atmosphere of poverty must be taken into consideration. Young (1964) noted that the poverty mother frequently needs a great deal of support and nurturing herself. The loneliness and social isolation of the lower-class mother suggested to others the use of group activities and "clubs" (Chilman and Kraft,

1963). It is further emphasized that these groups focus upon ways in which the mothers themselves, working in a group, can have maximum opportunities for quick success in meaningful skill development. "It is also important that these patterns be found by group members to provide a better coping mechanism for reality situations than previous patterns were." (Chilman, 1966, p. 85)

With these conclusions in mind, an attempt was made to create a group project to help mothers gain skills they would consider to be of value for satisfactory interaction with their children. The major aim of this pilot project was to assess the efficacy of a specific training program designed to enhance the linguistic style of urban ghetto mothers of preschool children. The attempt was to create and evaluate techniques which could be used to overcome limitations with reference to motivation, language, and communication skills. The method was to focus upon aspects of language communication which have been shown to be related to a child's success or failure in school, as well as to deficits in cognition, impulse control, and thinking style. The development of this pilot program was preliminary to an investigation of the effect of enhanced linguistic style of the ghetto mother upon her own learning, thinking, problem solving, and ability to communicate, (and ultimately upon the relationship of these to changes in the functioning of her child). Overcoming limitations in these areas is believed to have a positive impact upon the mental health functioning of both the mother and her child.

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Background Research Specific to the Study

Verbal Communication: The very early language experiences provided (or not provided) by a mother are most significant in shaping "information processing strategies in the child" (Hess, 1966).

Lower-class mothers often exhibit serious inadequacies and communication failures in their interactions with their young children (Hess and Shipman, 1966). Limitation specifically in verbal communication between mother and child and the relationship to poor emotional health and intellectual and educational deficits in the child is well documented (Ausubel and Ausubel, 1963; Bronfenbrenner, 1961; Deutsch, 1964; 1964a; Deutsch and Brown, 1964; and John, 1963).

Minuchin (1966) emphasized that within the lower-class environment, children do not expect to be talked to, listened to or heard when they have something to say. Even adults seldom carry a subject or topic to any conclusion.

These deficits have led to problems whenever organized nursery school programs attempted to use lower-class mothers as indigenous aides. Fowler (1967) discussed these difficulties following his attempt to explore the value of teaching mothers techniques to facilitate child development and learning in a cooperative nursery school for socially advantaged and disadvantaged children. The results indicated that while the lower-class mothers wanted the school program, often they had difficulty communicating with the other adults in the program, and did not know how to play with or read to the children.

Maternal Teaching Behavior: Hess and Shipman (1966) experimentally studied maternal teaching behavior as it related to children's learning. They found that the lower-class mother, in her verbal explanation to the child of a task presented, was frequently unable to give her child a goal which would evoke meaningful responses. She was often not specific in her directions, necessitating a guess rather than a guided answer from her child, and was unable to provide a sequence or pattern so that the child had a way of knowing how to

behave. After he did perform, frequently he was unable to predict his mother's reaction. Hess noted the parallel between the "good intent" but inadequate teaching of the lower-class mothers, and the experimental work of Maier (1949) who deliberately produced frustration in subhuman organisms. The lower-class mother was often unable to provide sufficient cognitive meaning in her verbalizations and explanations to her child. The result was that she actually structured the situation so that he not only failed to learn, but developed a negative response to the experience. Hess concluded that the ability of the mother to communicate verbally with her child in a manner adequate to help him function correctly, was a better predictor of the child's actual performance than a combination of the mother's intelligence and the social class position.

Maternal Language and Child Development: Specific to the present research proposal is the work of Olin, Hess, and Shipman (1965) in which a language scale was developed to measure dimensions of logical, syntactic, and cognitive complexity, and elaboration in mothers' speech. Samples of mothers' language were gained from responses to the task of telling the child a story from a picture. The storytelling language style was categorized. A factor analysis revealed a set of nine factors: verb elaboration, syntactic structure, the complexity of the verbs utilized, the length of the sentence, the level of abstraction, the range of adverbs and adjectives, the number of stimuli utilized, and the addition of content not included in the picture from which the story was being told. In this study, when comparisons were made between middle-class Negro mothers and upper-lower, lower-lower, and relief mothers (all Negro), significant differences were found for eight of the nine factors in favor of the middle-class mothers. Lower-lower and relief mothers spoke with significantly shorter sen-

tences, used fewer complex sentences, and had lower abstraction scores than middle-class mothers. When correlations were made between the mothers' language style and that of their children, the results indicated a significant correlation between the mothers' and children's abstraction scores. Thus, while "abstraction is a comparatively infrequent phenomenon among the culturally disadvantaged, when the phenomenon manifests itself, ...the mother's abstraction behavior has a noticeable impact on the child's development of abstract conceptualization" (p. 8). It was specified that it was not the mothers' abstraction ability per se but her abstract language behavior that was related to the child's cognitive abstraction. Within the lower-class group the longer the sentence and the more complex the verbs used by the mother to describe the story, the less apt the child was to be vague in his own thinking. Thus, lower-class mothers who spoke with longer sentences and used more elaborate verbs had children who gave fewer responses that were described as inadequate. It was also clear that among the lower-class mothers, those who included more characters and objects from the presented picture in their stories had children who gave significantly greater responses indicating the ability to categorize and make inferences about one object and its relationship to others as a group. It is notable that few of the lower-class children were capable of making responses involving concepts or categorization using the manifest physical attributes or properties of paired pictures or of basing a concept upon individual items or parts of two figures. This ability, which was related to the syntactical complexity of the sentences of the upper-lower and middle-class mothers, was previously found to be a favorable prognostic sign for educability (Hess, Shipman, and Jackson, 1965).

A number of the variables frequently found to distinguish the

language style of the lower-class mother and her child have also been found to be related to more basic and less adequate behavior described as "acting out expressed in hyperactivity, hyperaggressivity, temper tantrums, poor frustration tolerance, and other manifestations of diffuse discharge of tension" (Levine and Spivack, 1964, p. 81). Olin concluded that an important kind of deprivation within the lower class is a deficit in the linguistic environment provided by the mother. The middle-class mother's language tends to be highly elaborative, while in many cases the lower-class mother's language tends to be restrictive. However, lower-class mothers who verbalize, and who get their children to do so as well, tend to have children who are more precise and better able to express themselves. It is evident that a child's learning difficulties and limitations are, to a large degree, associated with a deficit in the early learning-teaching process between the mother and the child, and that this deficit is due to serious limitations in the way many lower-class mothers think and communicate with their children.

Conclusions and Questions: These conclusions suggest that one method to enhance the culturally deprived youngster's ability to think and to learn is to assist his mother to provide the language necessary for success very early in his life. To summarize: "Environmental modifications, plus simultaneous modifications in child-rearing patterns, are indicated to interrupt the cycle of poverty and its associated higher rates of mental illness" (Chilman, 1966, p. 39). Few programs have actually attempted such modifications.

In order to carry out the purposes of this study, the following questions were posed:

1. What specific techniques and materials might be utilized to develop the skills and knowledge necessary and pre-

liminary to change in the thinking and verbal communication of ghetto mothers?

2. What methods might be used to gain the interest, motivation and cooperation of individuals from a socio-economic and education level which previous research and clinical programs have noted to show limited motivation for group participation?
3. What are the special kinds of psycho-social problems which the mental health professional must understand and consider in order to create and maintain the active participation of individuals from a deprived background in a therapeutic group activity?
4. What roles can other community agencies play to enhance such a program?
5. What measures might be used to assess significant aspects of language style of individuals noted for deficits in reading skills and verbal facility and communication?
6. What are the techniques and difficulties which must be considered when assessing the language and thinking style of preschool ghetto children?

Table 1

Familial Characteristics of the Lower-Class Families:
A comparison with a middle class sample and
a Puerto Rican sample[1]

Size and Stability of the Family	Mother's Group		Middle Class		Puerto Rican Working Class	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Children in ordinal position						
1-3	50	(8)	97	(113)	49	(29)
4-8+	50	(8)	3	(3)	51	(31)
TOTALS		(16)		(116)		(60)
Stable Families	37	(6)	89	(74)	77	(41)
Disrupted Families	63[2]	(10)	11	(9)	23	(12)

[1] Hertzig, M. et al 1968: Families of 3-year-old Puerto Rican children living in New York City and similarly aged native-born middle class families.

[2] Includes single (unmarried) mothers.

II. Subjects and Procedures

The Subjects:

Since this was a pilot project to assess the efficacy of certain methodology there were two distinct phases involved. The main subjects of this study were seven mothers (of an initial sample of nine) who took part in Phase I. In addition, seven others took part in a second phase. All were mothers of three, four and five-year olds enrolled in a public preschool program in the ghetto area of North Philadelphia. Ten of the 16 families were welfare recipients and, as noted in Table I, the majority of families were disrupted. In 50 percent of the families, the child enrolled in the preschool program was low on the ordinal position in the family. A comparison with the samples of Hertzig (1968) is presented because of its interesting similarity to the New York Puerto Rican families and the similar contrast to the middle-class sample.

The specific focus of this report is, to a large degree, upon the seven mothers who were actively involved in Phase I. In this group, four were Negro and the others white. Five of the seven were welfare recipients. The mothers ranged in age from 25 to 42 years, with a mean age of 30.6 years. Education level ranged from 4th to 12th grade with an average attainment of 8.9 years. Four mothers, two Negro and two white, had completed nine or less years in school; while three, two Negro and one white, had completed high school. Intellectual assessment of the traditional type (PPVT),[1] found two of the mothers scoring below I.Q. 55, and the others scoring above this score but below or within the average range. The seven subjects had a total of 33 children (range 2-12). However, none had more than four chil-

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[1] Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (although valueless to this reporter from the point of view of accuracy of defining intellectual ability, is reported here to aid in reader in gaining a picture of the ability of the sample to respond to standardized tasks.)

dren living in the home with them at the current time. Only one of the seven was currently married, and three had never been married.

In addition to the seven subject mothers, three others attended the first two meetings. One of these mothers appeared to come from a higher socio-economic level (married, husband fully employed) and failed to return to the meetings. She was not included in any of the data presented. The two remaining mothers, with 8 and 9 years of education, currently had 8 and 5 children still living in the home with them. Both were welfare recipients.

All of the mothers lived in a densely populated area with living conditions at the lower end of the socio-economic scale. The area spanned a Negro-Puerto Rican ghetto designated as first priority for social-emotional-health and economic need in the State of Pennsylvania. Housing conditions ranged from decaying and extremely crowded tenements with broken doors, windows, and stairways, sour odors, piles of rags and dirty laundry, and sparse furniture, to modest two and three room apartments facing a park area. Almost all were grossly overcrowded. Many of the buildings on the streets had been abandoned, wrecked on the inside, and boarded up. Only two subjects had telephones

In this atmosphere of squalor, two characteristics of the subjects' behavior are noted. In some home visits, the initial response to the knock on the door was a loud, angry "Who's there," or "What d'ya want." This response appeared to be designed to keep strangers away. However, once the caller identified himself, the mothers acted quite pleased to be visited and to have someone to talk to. It was also apparent that in spite of great overcrowding, there was a high degree of warmth among the children. In two families, teenage daughters had babies. These infants were played with, tossed, rolled over, and frequently hugged and kissed. One mother, a 32-year old grandmother,

commented about her teenage daughter, "the girl just loves that child." However, unhappy feelings were clearly expressed by the teenage girls concerning their pregnancies. The grandmother did not appear to share these unhappy feelings. She proudly displayed a picture of her daughter (age 17) dressed in a white dress and stated that "this was when she was pregnant."

Each of the group mothers had at least one child of her own enrolled in the preschool program. All, therefore, stated that they knew of one another by sight if not by name. One of the mothers had previously been elected president of the mothers' organization. However, it was clear that even this mother did not know many of the others and did not think they knew her.

In summary, the mothers were relatively young (mean age: 30.6 years), had relatively large families (averaging more than 4 each), were without permanent men (only one was currently married), had limited education themselves (median less than 9th grade completion), and was dependent upon welfare payments as a means of support (only one was not receiving benefits). In addition, for some, living conditions were substandard.

Procedures:

This section includes the techniques and proceedings used to create and assess the program. Described are: 1) the design of the study, 2) the procedures used preliminary to the study, 3) the actual methods and techniques used in the course of the program, and 4) the measurement devices and methods.

1. The Design: Mothers of 9 three and four-year old children in a preschool program were assessed for certain aspects of language style. They were enrolled in a two hour, once a week program for 12 weeks. Due to the fact that the primary purpose of this program (for the Men-

tal Health Center) was to learn, and then to formalize techniques designe to enhance certain maternal language skills, no specific manipulations were proposed. A control group was originally included in the design. However, due to circumstances (described later) no control sample was available. Pre- and post-test measures were made in order to gain information concerning the language style of the mothers and to evaluate the general functioning of the children.

2. Preliminary Procedures: a. Contact with community agencies-- This exploratory project necessitated the cooperation of four different community agencies. First, the project idea was created within the Community Mental Health Center as an attempt to develop and assess techniques which might be helpful to the development of future mental health programs for urban poor families.

Once conceived, the project idea was presented to the Community Services Department of the Philadelphia Public Library. Its relevance to the work of the library was presented in terms of a hypothesis that the presence of preschool books would provide stimulation for the mothers and facilitate a successful experience at some level, thereby enhancing motivation and interest. The use of books and children's stories was proposed as the vehicle for both enhancing motivation and developing skills. It was theorized that an increase in meaningful skills would be the basis for increased communication between mother and child. In short, the rationale was that if lower-class mothers could learn to present stories to their children this would be considered beneficial both for the child and for the mother.

A specialist in children's work from the library was needed to take part in the creation of techniques and in the carrying out of the project. No special skills were proposed for the librarian. It was necessary for the library staff to begin this work with the skills

they presently had. However, it was necessary for the mental health staff to reassure the specialist in children's stories that, although modifications in techniques would be an essential part of the program, it was felt she had the basic skills needed to enter into such a program. It was made quite clear that responsibility for handling difficulties and administrative responsibility would be that of the Mental Health Center staff. There was a formalized agreement that an exploratory program would be carried out for a ten-week period.

As a third step in this coordinated effort to bring together the necessary community services, contact was made with the Director of Psychology of the Philadelphia "Get Set," a preschool program for urban youngsters. Proposed was the development of a program for the mothers of the children in the Get Set program. The project was proposed as an attempt to enhance the interest and ability of lower-class mothers in dealing with books designed for preschool children and then to assess the impact of such a program: 1) upon the functioning of the mothers and 2) upon the functioning of the children. The proposed method was a training program for personal and educational development of the mothers. Requested was the cooperation of the Get Set staff to gain involvement of 16 to 20 mothers in order to have eight to ten experimental group mothers and at least eight who would, for pilot purposes, provide a control group. Once this was communicated, and permission granted, it was necessary to contact the immediate supervisor of the preschool program and to describe its purpose to her.

b. Contact with the mothers--Through the efforts of the supervisor and her teaching staff, the initial contact was made with mothers. The mothers were told that this was the kind of program that would help them to help their children. Prior to the first meeting, the Get Set supervisor was given the following specific explana-

tion in order to communicate with the mothers about the purpose of the program:

> "Initially, we would like to be as conservative as possible. In this respect, we would like to focus upon the major issue, and that is, answering the question of how one goes about helping mothers to help their children. Underlying our thinking is: The lower-class mother is known for her limitations in the area of language communication. These deficits suggest missing elements in the way she talks and explains things to her child. On the other hand, it is clear that the lower-class mother, like all mothers, wants her child to be a successful learner. It is evident, however, that she does not know how to go about training her child toward a goal of success in our highly verbal and academic society. This project was designed, then, to start with the most concrete element of language and communication. Therefore, we are using preschool stories as taught by a professional story teller to stimulate the interest of the mothers. To encourage enthusiasm and maintain interest, we would like to tell the mothers that the reason we are using story telling is because we feel that is is important that mothers spend time with their children reading stories to them and talking about the stories. While we don't want to promise that if they read to their child and come to every meeting of the group that their child will read better and do better in school, we want the mothers to understand that we, as professional educators, feel this will better prepare the child for later success as a learner."

An initial meeting was arranged to coincide with the end of the morning school session of the children. At this meeting babysitters were available at the Center in order for the mothers to bring all of their other children and thereby to be freed to take part. A full lunch was served to each mother and child and a description of the program presented. The purpose was restated as a program to help mothers to learn to tell stories to their children. The rationale was presented and a reemphasis was made that it was <u>not</u> a reading program and, in fact, <u>no</u> reading was necessary. It was proposed that a second meeting be held the next day to demonstrate "what would happen." Meeting times were proposed and agreed upon. Once a meeting schedule was set, the Get Set supervisor, teachers and home and school coordinator accepted the responsibility for promoting the program. They did

so overtly, by reminding mothers of the importance of the meetings, by visiting the homes of each family and by setting up a class time when the mothers could practice their skills with groups of children, and more subtly by reinforcing attendance and commenting upon the fact that a particular mother attended or was missed at the meeting that week. To some degree, the Get Set staff functioned as if the "mothers' project" was considered to be an important part of the overall program.

c. Additional arrangements--The meetings were to be held at the school building which was a church centrally located in this ghetto community. The program was presented to the church pastor after all preliminary agreements were made. The presentation of the program "after the fact" was an error, but created no difficulty due to the active community mindedness of the pastor.

The library administration then agreed to provide the books to be used and to allow the librarian who was to serve as group leader, to act as a lending library. Regulations concerning the use and return of books were relaxed to encourage use and to decrease the mothers' fear of having to pay for loss or damage.

Methods:

Language Style: Using preschool level books, an attempt was made to develop techniques to aid in increasing the mothers' verbalizations and to help the mothers to encourage their children to do so as well. The intent was to use high interest material to capture the mother's attention, and to encourage them to increase their skills and ability to relate to the material presented. It was necessary to develop methods at various levels. If a mother was found to be unable to read words, she was rewarded for attempts to describe what she saw in pictures. If a mother demonstrated a desire and ability to use reading skills, she was encouraged to both tell and read the stories. Reading

per se was never taught nor encouraged. The focus of training for all of the mothers was upon lengthening and completing thoughts, elaborating upon thoughts and ideas, and improving observational skills.

During the opening session a story was presented by the leader to a few of the children, with the mothers present as observers. A simple story was selected, and the children were encouraged to point out objects or were asked about objects. The attempt was to demonstrate how much the children know and were aware of and their amount of interest when told a story.

Specific methods used by the leader were continually pointed out as models whenever a mother presented a story to the group. Concretely, the mothers were taught how to hold a book when reading to others (so that others could see the pictures), how to present a story to a small group by glancing at the pictures from the side rather than looking directly into the book, how to present a story to one or two children who would sit beside the reader, etc. The group leader served in this manner both as an instructor for techniques and as a model for behavior.

At each meeting, a wide selection of colorful picture books was placed on the table for the mothers to leaf through. (See appendix for annotated bibliography.) When a mother showed interest in a particular book, the group's attention was called to the fact that "Mrs.___ seems to like the _____book." At that time the leader described the content of the book and her reason for selecting it; (i.e., "Most children like the big pictures..." or "Children like that story because it's funny." "Children are never too young to enjoy that book.") In the earlier sessions, the leader frequently told the entire story to the group. The stories were presented "as if to your children." After a few sessions each book was merely introduced and begun by the leader. Once introduced, each group member was encouraged

to take the book and to tell part of the story in sequence. This was accomplished by passing the book from member to member, each pausing a few moments to gain an idea from the page and then presenting part of the story.

To encourage each mother's participation and cooperation, and to overcome limitations, a wide range of techniques were used. For the most limited mothers, it was initially necessary to have the leader or another member literally hold the book and to accept the "reader's" turning of the pages, with perhaps an infrequent comment, as her "share" of the responsibility. On these occasions, and as a general technique, others were encouraged to retell certain parts of a story in order to extend verbalizations and communication. The mothers viewed these techniques as "the way to present stories to our children."

The mothers were encouraged to take books home to use with their own children, "to try out telling stories to your children and to report back to the group on how you did." At each following meeting, each mother was recognized particularly for having taken a book home: "What I was interested in today was whether you got to use any of the books you took home. I was particularly curious about you, Mrs._____. Did you get a chance to read that book?...I have another good one for you." In this way each mother was singled out and provided with a specially selected book. Each group member was then encouraged to "present her story"--"tell it like you told it to your children." Whatever attempt was made by a mother was accepted as a "good" method for her. Effort was rewarded more intensely than skill. The major source of reward was the leader's undivided attention and huge amounts of verbal praise.

Certain aspects of each book were discussed following a reading (i.e., "You can help your children by beginning with simple learning

books like Mrs._____'s ABC book"; "that book is very interesting to children because they like the animals.") Simplified concepts presented in the books were also presented (i.e., "the story is about things that are different...things that are big, things that are small, fat and thin...this helps the children to see how things are different.") Those comments were used to begin discussion of what children like and what the mother can do to help her child to like books. Following a reading, the question of whether or not a book was liked and why, was discussed. The mothers were told "You have to like a book before your child will like it. If you don't like a book, your child won't like it."

In this same manner, the mothers were also introduced to techniques for observing their child's reactions. They were asked how they knew whether or not their child "liked" a book. To aid their observations and interactions with their children, specific clues were presented both by the leader and the group members: Did the child name objects, did he want you to read the story again, did he remember the story once it was read, did he recognize the story when he saw it on television?, etc. An effort was also made to orient the mothers toward verbal interaction behavior with their children. Emphasis was given to understanding the indications of specific aspects of child language behavior and how mothers could respond. The leader was encouraged to use personalized anecdotes to aid the learning process. One example of an attempt to help the mothers to understand children's questions is presented below:

> "Coming back on the El last week, I sat here and a mother and a little boy sat in back of me. I was reading and she was reading. When we got along the part where you could see the river there and the boat, he was just hysterical, you know. He wanted to tell his mother all these things and she wouldn't listen. She was so impressed with her book that she didn't want to have anything to do with him at all. <u>He was very bright</u>. He said "Look at the tug. . .

> Look at that big boat. Is that an army boat?" Finally he started to bother me. He just wanted somebody to listen to him, and she said 'Don't bother that lady, she's reading.' I turned around and I said 'No, that's all right. I have a little boy. My little boy is bigger now, but we used to come back on the El like this.' So I listened to him all the way up. I thought 'Isn't that a shame because he was so bright and so ready and she just couldn't be bothered.' She was much too busy to be involved with him. It was very unfortunate."

Using this as a model, the mothers were urged to relate their own similar experiences with their children. As the interest and involvement of the mothers was gained, some stories were introduced specifically with a question concerning life-like situations involving their children:

> "This story is about how children begin to play together. It's really like a typical Get Set scene. But some of the children don't look happy. Does that happen that the children are not happy in the beginning and don't want to stay in school? They don't join in with the other boys and girls?"

The attempt was to use this method to help the mothers to see some stories as having a relationship to real life, and to use this realization as the impetus for increasing meaningful discussion.

As a later step, designed to encourage some independence, the mothers were told to "pretend that you are the teacher and that you were going to teach other mothers like yourself to read stories to their children; what would you do?" In this context, stories were told and retold by different members to "see how to better help the mothers to tell the stories to their children." The mothers were asked to articulate why they presented a story in a particular way and to discuss the other's methods.

In order to give the mothers an opportunity to try out skills and to gain feedback concerning progress, each mother was encouraged to present a story to the children during the Get Set program. The teacher structured the situation in order to assure optimal success

by having the mother read to a small group and by being nearby to head off any crises.

Motivation and a feeling of belonging: In addition to the creation and testing of specific techniques designed to enhance the mothers' linguistic style, it was necessary to develop techniques to enhance motivation and to overcome some of the personal limitations of the mothers. Due to the nature of backgrounds and present life situations, it became apparent that technique development involved issues differing from (but probably related to) the major focus of the study. Techniques had to be developed to overcome anxiety and fears concerning felt or actual personal inadequacies, and to enhance the prospects of creating a feeling of belonging to the group.

In an attempt to overcome some of these limiting factors, the reason for the program, and what it was not, were frequently restated during the preliminary sessions. Continually reemphasized was the fact that it was not a reading program. This was stated directly and whenever a mother attempted to read the text of a story aloud. Story books were presented in which no text was included.

Lunch was served at each meeting (or coffee and cakes for meetings held later in the day) and babysitters always provided. Prior to all meetings, the mental health center staff sent letters to each of the mothers reminding them of the time:

"Dear Mrs._____:

Don't forget. We're looking forward to seeing you this Wednesday at 1:00 P.M. at the Get Set."

Each letter was followed with a visit to the homes by the mental health center staff. After the second meeting this visit was accompanied by one of the mothers.

One clue used in the development of these techniques was the

mothers' statements concerning the problems in their own lives and their feeling that this program would help them to "learn to relax," as well as help them to help their children. Therefore, at no time during the 12 weeks were demands made upon the women that they could not meet. Inadequacies were never focused upon, but were ignored. All efforts to respond and take part were blatantly rewarded. An attempt was made to encourage the mothers to follow the model presented and to respond positively to the efforts of others. Attention span limitations were dealt with by the leaders by ignoring all irrelevant behavior and by attending closely and obviously to appropriate behavior.

In addition, discussions were frequently begun by stating to the mothers, "We need your help...Why do you think...happened?" (i.e., some mothers did not return to a second meeting.)

Every effort was made to encourage a feeling of belonging. Each of the mothers was recognized by name whenever she took part, and suggestions for the making of name tags, home visits, etc. were very much encouraged and recognized when they had occurred. Humor and laughter were very much enhanced. While the leaders tried not to "overdo it," no attempt was made to suppress amusement and pleasure. Issues and stories which previously might have received a smile were laughed at and commented upon. All of this was designed to direct attention toward the goals of the project.

At the end of the ten weeks, a party was held. The mothers were encouraged to invite guests. The group decided that they would invite representatives from five other Get Set Centers. The purpose would be to "show off" and to demonstrate what they had done in their mothers' group. They prepared stories to present to the guests. During the party a discussion was held concerning the project. Each mother was given a diploma which read: "The Hahnemann Medical College and Hospital

of Philadelphia, Community Mental Health Center, Hotel Philadelphia--314 North Broad Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19102 and the Philadelphia Get Set Program present this award to..... for her participation in the first Mothers' Story Hour Program 1968." They were told that this was a diploma that they had earned, not something for their children.

Second Phase: Once the above procedures were completed, a second phase was devised due to the fact that the mothers expressed the desire to continue the group. In addition, the guests at the party expressed a desire to take part in such a program. In order to carry on with the mothers' club, it became necessary for the mothers to take responsibility for the "teaching" (the librarian was to take part only in the first 10 weeks). Four of the original mothers decided that they would continue, both their own group, and lead a second group at another Center ten blocks away. They wanted to use the same procedures they had learned. A second mothers' group was formed, and children's books, food and babysitters were provided. The original mothers served as the teachers and the stimulators of discussion.

Throughout the entire program at least one member of the mental health center staff was always in attendance and active participation.

Measurement:

The mothers were evaluated prior to and following the training period. Initial base-line measures were gained by presenting each mother with a series of Children's Apperception Test cards (Bellak and Bellak, 1961) and requiring the mother to tell a story, from the picture presented, to her child. These stories were tape recorded for analysis and tabulation for sentence length, complex verb preference (proportion of complex verb types to all verb types, simple and complex) stimulus utilization (number of presented objects or persons actually

used in the stories), and introduced content (content not part of the presented picture but enhancing the story). This technique was developed by Olin, Hess, and Shipman (1965) and the factors analyzed discriminated between middle and lower-class mothers and were related to the language facility of their children. This procedure was repeated at the end of the ten-week experimental period and again near the end of the school year, approximately 10 weeks later, to assess changes in maternal responses as a consequence of the training program.

The specific aspects of language measured were:

Mean Sentence Length

The average number of words per sentence. Sentences are marked off on the basis of the three kinds of signals by which the native speaker of English recognizes sentence divisions in spoken language: pitch, stress, and juncture (the joinings and pauses in the flow of an utterance). Where aberrations of intonation patterns created ambiguity of sentence demarcation, traditional definitions of a sentence were used supplementarily, such as that a sentence contains a complete thought or that a sentence contains a subject and a predicate.

Verb Elaboration

This is the number of complex verb types per sentence. The score is based on the number of complex verb types (excluding repetitions) divided by the number of sentences in the protocol to account for protocol length. A complex verb form is a verb containing more than one element in the verb stem or phrase, e.g., is going, has been done.

Preference for Complex Verbs

This is the proportion of complex verb types (excluding repetitions) to the total verb types, both simple and complex. A simple verb is a verb of only one word (is, made).

Stimulus Utilization

This score consists of the number of characters (including parts of characters) and objects present in the projective test picture which the testee uses in the story he makes up.

Introduced Content

This score consists of the number of characters (and parts of characters) and objects which are not present in the projective test picture but which are introduced by the testee into the story he makes up.

While the focus of this preliminary study was upon the impact of the technique developed in the language of the mothers, an attempt was made to gain information concerning the language of their children. The following children's tests and assessment devices were assessed and evaluated.

a) Intellectual functioning:

The Peabody Picture Vocabulary (PPV). This instrument is an individually administered task purported to be useful for individuals with limited language ability. The Peabody yields a mental age score and I.Q. for subjects from pre-school age to adulthood (Dunn, L. M., 1959).

b) School specific readiness:

1. The Office of Education - developed Preschool Inventory (based on the research of Bettye Caldwell, 1965). This instrument provides information on preschool readiness in eight areas: personal orientation, body image, number concepts, general information, visual discrimination and association, relationships, following directions and comprehension of social roles. (The scoring system was devised by Chorost, Goldstein, and Silberstein, 1967).

c) Language functioning:

1. Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities. This instrument measures the child's ability to organize, mediate and retain linguistic symbols, to make associations and allows for analysis of the adequacy of various combinations of sensory input and output. (McCarthy and Kirk, 1961).

2. Inventory of Oral Communication for Children. (New York City More Effective Schools Program.) The child's expressive ability is rated in four areas: Language Structure, Speech Production, Naming and Linguistic skills; receptive language ability is measured in two areas: Auditory Discrimination and Listening Comprehension.

d) Nursery school behavior:

1. Devereux Elementary School Behavior Rating Scale. A factor analyzed scale developed for use with school age children to assess achievement related classroom behavior. (Spivack and Swift, 1967, Swift and Spivack, 1968). An attempt will be made to evaluate its usefulness with the 3 and 4 year-old child.

2. The Schenectady Kindergarten Rating Scales. A factor analyzed scale developed to measure dimensions of behavior "thought to be related to future school achievement and emotional adjustment" (Conrad and Tobiessen, 1965).

III. Comments upon the program, its design, special problems and findings:

Action research in the urban ghetto: Research methodology of an experimental nature requires a well developed and articulated research design, clear articulation of goals and purpose, and most importantly a pre-program description of the means to be used to attain these

goals. The usual attempt is to control for researcher bias and subjectivity by having matched groups of experimental and control subjects. These procedures are used to act as tests against selective observation (or omissions) and conclusions based, not upon the data, but upon the previous assumptions and desires for success of the experiments. The purpose of an experimental design is to add objectivity to conclusions concerning the "effects" of a particular program.

Since this is the "age of social change" in America and the writer has found himself deeply concerned with the plight of the "underclass," his problem of subjectivity and bias became particularly great. In this case the researcher became deeply involved with the "experimental subjects" of the study. He found them very warm and likeable and grew more and more desirous for change for their lives. Thus, while the design called for an equal number of mothers to form experimental and control groups, no changes were made when control mothers were unavailable. At the initial meeting, nine mothers (out of the 10 in attendance) expressed the desire to take part in the story hour program. Due to the exploratory nature of the program and the fact that the nine had come to the meeting because they were motivated to do something "now," it was decided to include all in the "experimental" group. Therefore, the "results" of this study must be read as the description of observations of an "experimentor" who worked and became personally concerned with his subjects.

This problem might be understood in light of what is considered to be one of the major findings of the study: The personal involvement of <u>each</u> participant, was crucial. While cooperation between the library, the Get Set, the Church, and the Mental Health Center was essential to organizing the project, significantly more essential it appears, was the ongoing personal involvement of the "experimentors"

and their subjects.

Special problems of the mothers: In spite of the rather narrow purpose of the design of the study (to facilitate language style and skill in presenting stories) a vast number of psychological issues were presented by the mothers. Over half of the mothers talked of the fact that they had at one or more times in their lives or the lives of their children, severe psychological problems. They described these as "nervous breakdowns" and indicated severe depression which for some necessitated psychiatric treatment. One of the mothers was an orphan passed from foster home to foster home, and another had spent most of her childhood and adolescence in a school for the blind. (While very poorly sighted, she was able, at this time, to see enough to function on her own without aid other than glasses.) She now had a child enrolled in the same institution. One mother had a problem with alcohol and, to some degree, disrupted the first few meetings. During the first meetings two mothers refused to remove their coats even when encouraged to "get comfortable." It was also necessary to acknowledge and to support one of these mothers whose daughter had been molested on the street for the second time, another whose "husband" was continually drunk and became violent, and a third who feared that her child was mentally retarded.

Particularly relevant to this discussion is the impression of many writers of the "alienation" of the lower class. This is not necessarily nor only directed at the middle class, but within the lower class neighborhood as well. It was not until the third meeting that there was an open concern for "knowing" one another. During the third meeting, it was decided that name tags would be made to display each mother's name. Prior to this point, the overriding preoccupation was with the self. Earlier attempts to interact were continually inter-

rupted by concerns for food, and with personalized issues. These factors deterred the group interaction and resulted in diverted attention and distractions.

One mother, previously elected president of the school parent group, commented that she didn't really know the others "before this group," and did not "know how to get to know them."

> "We just said hello; bumped into each other when they bring in their child. But I didn't know them when they picked me president--before the story group. I never knew any mothers. Since then I got very friendly with the mothers. We come in before the story hour. The mothers in the story group are more helpful. Since we had our story hours we been getting real friendly. We [still] don't see much outside of "Get Set," except we had a demonstration [sales of kitchen ware] at one of the houses and the group mothers came...now I'm having one over my house every Wednesday."

Two other mothers commented upon their surprise that they had lived close to one another and yet were not previously acquainted. "Mrs._____ and I have been talking a good bit this week; since we found out after about five weeks that we live almost next door to each other..."

This lack of concern for interaction and the high level of distractibility and limited attention span caused the first few meetings to be somewhat chaotic. During these meetings there was little attention paid to learning about others and very rarely did one call another by name. The tape recordings of the first two meetings were literally incoherent due to the fact that it was a rare occasion when only one person was speaking and others listened quietly. The flow of talk was punctuated and diverted by irrelevant remarks. In addition, the mothers were overalert to their own children and felt compelled to issue commands and directives. (The children were present due to the fact that the playroom was in the next room and within clear vision of the mothers.) The librarian leader commented after the second meet-

ing, "Their attention span was very poor, and it appears that they and their children have very little experience in listening." It was not until each mother in her own way felt able to deal with the group demands that "listening" behavior began to increase.

In spite of all of these difficulties, from the first meeting there were signs of the desire to belong and to be a part of something (as well as of defenses designed to deny fears and to hide feelings). For example, the letters sent to remind them of the meeting were omitted prior to the third week. Several of the mothers questioned each other, "Did you get your letter?" The letters were reinstated. At the next meeting several brought their letter. One mother commented that she "never has any mail" and, "This was the only letter I got in a long time." Other evidence suggested a very high need on the part of the mothers for human contact and for external approval of their own behavior. There was a great deal of physical contact within the group and between group members and the leaders. It was not uncommon for one to gently shove another when seated around the table or to touch or slap another's arm or leg in a playful manner. One mother stood and leaned against the mental health leader to talk personally of a "particular troubling problem" at home. She was extremely shy, and talked little but managed to ask if she "could get help with her old man who wasn't interested in doing anything." This same woman later asked if the leader liked her and in what at first seemed to be anger stated, "I ain't coming back next week; no more for me. And if you come to my house I'm gonna punch you in the eye." It was quickly apparent to all that this was her way of testing things out and relating to the group. Others responded by reassuring the leaders that she was "just teasing us." However, the defensive nature of the behavior seemed clear. If we had not responded and played with her at her game, she would have lost nothing because she had publicly denied her interest and needs.

In an attempt to draw group members together at the beginning of each meeting the leader asked, "Who are we missing?" The effort was to have all aware that those not in attendance were missed and were very much in mind. This trend was carried even further by asking if, "We have to let them know that we missed them - that we want them here." The librarian leader also expressed her concerns and her purpose. "I hope I didn't frighten them away last week. I could read stories to you every week and tell you stories but I want you to have the fun." Her concern was based upon her finding the previous week that,

> "For the first time I realized how very sophisticated our picture books are. I didn't realize how really limited their backgrounds are. I wondered as we left if any of them would return. It is certainly much too soon for most of these mothers to use books which give ideas of how children can learn ABC's, numbers, colors, sizes and shapes."

Some examples of the limitation in background of some of the mothers are presented in the stories below. These stories occurred at the end of 20 weeks of training. The mother presenting the story has been described here as "somewhat alcoholic." She appeared at the first meeting in a disheveled state. She continually claimed she was not returning. Her every interaction with her children was characterized by arm extended, "smacks" across the face and harsh commands for obedience. After four weeks her mode of dress changed. It was apparent she was aware of her poor physical impression. She was obviously disappointed when a mother she now called her friend had a party, inviting others and not her. She was clearly illiterate; unable to read many of the simplest words. Unable to present her own stories she merely held up the book, hid her face behind it and turned the pages. She spoke with much pride concerning the fact that she read (had held the book and turned pages) to some children in the class. Even with her limitations it was apparent that she was aware of the fact that

when other mothers told the stories her child stopped to listen. At the final session she brought her child into the room to show how she "tells stories" to her. Her stories:

Holding a picture of a mother kangaroo and her children.

Child: What's that, a rabbit?

Mother: Seen that at the zoo. That's not a baby rabbit. That's a baby kangaroo.

Child: He been in the water

Mother: No, he's going in the water. They're going on a picnic. Water all around here. Do you see that house?

Child: Yup

Mother: That's where they're playing at.

Child: Oh

Mother: Look (pointing)

Child: A bike and a rabbit and a baby

Mother: Going home.

Child: All these going home.

A second story involved a picture of a lion seated in a large chair and a little mouse standing at his hole.

Mother: What;s this?

Child: A tiger

Mother: Um hum. What's this?

Child: (response unintelligible)

Mother: No, that'a a pipe he's making...and he's crippled.

Child: Crippled

Mother: Um hum. He's thinking something up to do. What's that?

Child: A rabbit

Mother: That's a mouse.

Child: Look, a mouse.

Mother: What him doing? Him gonna eat.

Child: Gonna eat.

Mother: Him holding his chin up on his hand.

Both stories involved an attentive interaction on the part of both mother and child. This was not possible for the mother alone prior to the program. The mother has learned to use and attempt to elicit specific objects and details in the pictures and in addition, introduces (from imagination) a number of elements which enrich her "story." Her feeling of belongingness and even of skill development become more and more evident. The Get Set Supervisor commented:

> "The alcoholic mother who was accepted by everyone knew it! She made every effort to attend regularly, often coming hours earlier, appeared to be less harsh with her children and more useful in how she helped the teacher; she belonged and actually became a real part of the group."

With respect to other group members, the Supervisor noted:

> "They have been more interested in using their new skills in the classroom, rather pleased and satisfied to work with an individual child or small group, and seemed to have a new look at the value of what they were doing as well as how."

A teacher reported that a child (of another one of the group mothers) who had been very quiet and non-verbal had become much more communicative as his mother became involved in the group. During the project it was noted that this mother, as well as one other, had latent ability. Initially, both gave the impression of having very limited ability. The quiet mother showed an interest in poetry which was nurtured. She asked to present a poem and presented the following (reproduced in part):

Life's Scars

> "One great truth I found while journeying to the west,
> The only folks you really wound are those you love
> the best...Love does not grow on every tree. . .
> But soon or late the fact grows plain

To all our sorrows test, the only folks who give us pain
are those we love the best."

"What do you think it means?" she was asked.

"Well, when I read it I thought, just like it says, "Life's Scars"...The people that do the most for you, you hurt 'em in some way. Well, the people you love the best you hurt 'em. I feel that's when you do the most hurt, for the people you love. You don't want to hurt 'em but you end up hurtin' 'em."

For this mother, as well as for some of the others, there was increasing evidence of a greater awareness of their own feelings and those of their children. Some spoke of a "difference" in their children as well as in their own lives.

"I got a lot and I learned a lot myself. It did me good. Before I wasn't interested in something like this. I never even sat down and read a book or, in fact, I find books on my own and give it to my child. This is no lie. She looks at books and she reads them and tells me about them, the stories in the book. Then I'll tell her about it and she reads to her little sister about it."

The increase in awareness of the children's interest in stories was paralleled in time by the mothers' desire to know more about the "meaning" of the stories. As an example one children's story particularly intrigued them. This story is presented briefly to serve as an aid to understanding this process.

Basically, the story is told through the use of pictures of blue and yellow blots of color. Two "big" blue dots and one "little" one and two "big" yellow dots with one "little" one are depicted in interaction.

The little blots "play" together and become green. When each returns to his respective big blots he is met with "I don't know you. You're not our little yellow (little blue)." The story ends with the big blots realizing what has happened.

When the story was read the first time during the fourth week, it was analyzed by the mothers as "a story about colors. You mix blue

and yellow and get green." Since the attempt was to encourage use of books with the children and to lower anxiety and feelings of inability, to do so no "correction" effort was made. However, during the tenth session the story was presented again, this time by the mothers themselves. This time the mothers concluded that this could be a story about people. They noted that when people get together "they become more like each other like the blots did" and that "children are more able to ignore people's differences than adults. We can learn something from children."

A discussion of the same story arose at a later meeting during which the first group mothers were teaching others. One mother was troubled by a neighborhood occurrence. Her child had had a fight with another. She had gotten involved with the other mother and they were now enemies while the two children had once again become friends. The mother had commented upon how much alike the children were and upon how they could get together but she and the other woman could not. The teacher mother noted how "this was like a book we read, Little blue and little yellow. The kids are more able to forget about differences than the adults."

In order to focus upon the purpose of the study and to capitalize upon the growing awareness of the impact of their behavior upon the growth and development of their children, the mothers were prepared to use their skills in order to teach others. They were asked to think about how they would help other mothers to learn to tell stories.

The attempt was to assess the progress of the mothers in terms of the ability to use pictures to develop stories. Specifically, we were interested in the degree to which the mothers were able to name and label objects and to use these as stimuli for their own imaginations.

Presented is an example typical of the techniques used and

revealing the process through which the mothers were moved in an attempt to develop the desired skills.

Mother 1: "Well, I'd sit down and read to the mothers."

Mother 2: "Look here, now you're supposed to be doing it."

Mother 1: "This is a book about red light-green light. And that's a book about traffic. You know, how you go across the street. Here you see red lights, green light and good morning. This is a policeman and he's stand on the corner. And this is a stop sign. Here he blows his horn and says 'Go.' ...Over here it says 'I'll read it.' 'In the morning they all come out of their house. Red light, they can't go. Green light, they can go.' I can imagine they're talking about the people."

Mother 3: "I tried to teach the story like I could teach the children. That's what we're here for, not necessarily for ourselves. We're here to teach the children and not necessarily ourselves."

Mother 4: "I would do it differently."

Leader: "How would you do it?"

Mother 4: (Holding the book up.) "There's not much in this but pictures. Pictures are educational for your children. This is what your children like. The book is colorful. You could ask them to point out to you what they see in the pictures. You might ask him to count how many on each page."

Mother 1: "It shows you what they do."

Mother 2: "Do it as a story."

Mother 1: "It's hard to do this as a story because there's something different on each page."

Leader: "Is there a story here?"

Mother 1: "I don't think so. It's just words."

Mother 5: "There is a story here. It looks like twins who might be getting ready for school. In the first one you see one's getting her hair done and the other one's getting washed. Now they're getting on their socks and their shoes. They're getting ready for school. There's mother standing there with their sweaters for them."

Leader: "Is that the whole story?"

Mother 3: "This story, she's trying to teach them how to dress proper and you can see they're not proper dressed. One has mix-match socks on. She's just teaching them how

to put their clothes on correctly and match the colors."

Mother 5: "I'd say this is the mother and she's dressing. I'll give the girl's names. This is Susan and this is probably Dot. She's doing Susan's hair. Putting a ribbon there. Putting a ribbon in her hair. Susie hasn't got on her shoes or nothing yet. She's just got her slip on right now. Over here her mother is putting her bow on and her sister, Dot, is in the other room. Looks like she's got a sock in her hand and over here they both are getting ready for school. They both are putting shoes and socks on. The mother brings the sweaters to them and they hiding from her. They want to dress themselves apparently. She knows that they do it backward; do it wrong. She's trying to show 'em the right way to do it. Here she holds the sweater up. I guess she wants them to choose which sweater belongs to which one. 'Cause they got different color socks on and she's trying to see if they know their sweaters."

Leader: "What's the problem they have?"

Mother 5: "They want to do it by themselves and the mother wants to correct them. They try to prove to her that they can dress themselves."

In addition to the increase in use of objects and people in the development of the above integrated story, there was demonstrated a significant increase in the perception of the role of the mother figure. This story and others to be presented, clearly illustrate the development and articulation of the mothers' perception of their role in the life, education and training of their children, as well as increased perception of the children's dependence upon them for help in coping with situations they encounter.

To illustrate this change in perception of the mother-child interaction over time, some pre-and post-test stories of different mothers are reproduced. The first mother initially merely described what she saw. In the post-test she introduced an element of relationship and concluded with her feelings about that relationship.

Pre-test: "It is a mother kangaroo and a baby kangaroo going for a walk."

Post-test: "This is a momma and the two baby kangaroos going for a walk, coming from the store. The one little kangaroo is riding a bicycle. It looks like they're having a good time."

These "stories" illustrate that while remaining quite limited in ability to express herself verbally, the mother was better able to "give" something of herself and the qualitative change suggested a beginning of the projection of a mother-child relationship as pleasurable.

A second mother, somewhat less limited in amount of verbalization initially told a story which was fragmented and revealed the perception of little interaction between people. . Her story is noteable in its omission of any mother figure and in the lack of dependence of the "chicks" upon any adult for assistance or guidance.

Pre-test: "Once upon a time, there were three chicks. They was in the house. They lived in this house by themselves and this rooster came. They were eating at the time. They was surprised to see him watching them really. He was watching them eating. There was this one chicken. They got their napkins on. Holding their spoons in their hands. One was holding his spoon wrong 'cause if he had his food on it, he would spill it. The other one's holding a spoon like this. The other was holding his spoon up. If there was food on it, they'd would spill it. They got their bowls away from them mostly. Looks like they're eating porridge. They look like they're having a good time."

Twenty weeks later her story includes a mother concerned about her children and children portrayed as able to delay gratification and to depend upon the mother to take care of them. (It is interesting to note, as well, the lack of certainty expressed by this mother illustrated by her inability to predict, with certainty, the behaviors of her children.) Nevertheless, this story clearly illustrates a successful mother-child interaction built upon some well articulated guidelines for child and maternal behavior. The mother is described as "lookin' to see what they're gonna do;" as having an awareness of what the children are doing; and an awareness of the children's uncertainty. At the same time, the children are depicted as very much in tune with the desires of the mother; for whom "they all supposed to wait."

Post-test: "Well, here's a picture of three little chicks. They're sittin at the table and gettin ready to eat-porridge I guess. And the mother hen is lookin over. I guess she's lookin' to see what they're gonna do. They got the spoons and they're decidin what to do with the spoons. Three empty dishes are before 'em. And they don't know whether to dip the spoons and take the porridge and put it in their dish or wait 'til the mother feeds them. And they all seem to be lookin at each other. One of them seems to be lookin to see if the mother is comin' to feed them. But at the end I guess they get fed. The mother feeds them. They all supposed to wait til she gets there."

The increase in "intuneness" of the mothers to their children appeared to occur to one degree or another for each mother. There was the development of an alertness to the behavior of the children dramatized by comments concerning their shift in perception of the meaning of that behavior. The constant questions of the two, three and four year old were frequently dealt with as annoyances and the source of much irritation for the mother. However, once the preschool books were introduced, it was apparent that the children's questions provided feedback to the mothers concerning the stories they themselves were anxious to tell and to communicate. The feedback from the youngsters, as well as the techniques used and described earlier appeared to give insight with respect to the potential impact of a mother's response to her child, upon the future functioning of that child. One mother noted the relationship between a mother's handling of a young child's questions and their later relationship:

"Yeah, I think if you can suppress a child's curiosity now at the age of 3 or 4, they won't have any later on. If he wants to ask you something he might think, 'No, she's too busy. I won't even bother.' If they can't ask you questions when they're 3 or 4, they're never going to (when they're older) because you're too busy and then you'll be too busy all the time. Then you won't have any idea what they're doing."

The change in perception of their ability to affect the lives of their children appeared to coincide with changes in feelings about themselves and about what was happening in their own lives. One

mother stated that when she was telling stories to her children and they listened and enjoyed themselves, "It made me feel useful."

A second mother added,

> "When my child asks me to read him a story, I can do it. I feel as though I'm needed. Since I joined this story hour, my little boy____, he drives his teacher crazy going up there talking about, "Read me a story, read me a story." And he wants me to come into school [Get Set] practically every day to read him a story. And a couple of times I did go to class and read a story to him. He thinks he's a big wheel, his mother can read a story book." [laugh]

The mother had reason to feel pride. She could read the children's story books and hold their attention throughout! Her child had moved in the twenty weeks from a quiet-withdrawn, almost non-verbal pose in the classroom, to an active, questioning participant whose mother was something special.

At the final meeting, after 20 weeks, another mother eloquently and poignantly summarized the group feelings in terms of her own life:

> "What we're interested in doing is mostly getting out of... what we're considered as, the ghetto. The children who become more interested in things, they find out there's a world opened up to them. So if your children find that you're interested, and [you] read to your children, later on they take it on themselves. This is a start to do better for our children than was done for us. There was nothing for us. I haven't had much education. I went as far as 6th grade in one school. Then I was put in another school. I was placed in a special class which, at that time, didn't give you much interest. I mean, if you figure you're going to stay in a special class and you're not going to move on to another grade, this doesn't stimulate much interest in learning. When I was 16 years old, this one woman took an interest in me and taught me how to read and write. I'm still not much of a reader but I can sort of tell stories. I don't even remember being read to. It was never impressed upon me that books helped you learn about things going on out there. I think if we want to get our children so that they don't want to live just an every day life like we were brought up and we lived, we need to have programs like this. If this went on in each center there wouldn't be a need for a Get Set because there wouldn't be a ghetto. We wouldn't be set apart as a ghetto."

Specific measurement of the mothers' language and findings: One of the aims of the project was to test the efficacy of methods designed to enhance the linguistic style. Measurement was made pre, post and ten weeks later along a number of dimensions as described earlier. In view of the size of the group, the results are described with no statistical tests.

The mothers, as a group, showed decreases in the number of words they used when asked to "Tell a story to your child," using a Children's Apperception Test picture. They also used less sentences to tell the story. However, there was an increase in the length of the sentences used implying that while the mothers felt less compelled to tell longer stories, they were more able to use sentences which were longer and gramatically more complex.

While a number of aspects of verb usage, verb elaboration, and complexity were measured, no attempt was made during the project to focus upon these aspects of language. The mothers consistently used less verbs in their later stories than in the earlier ones.

Most interesting, however, was the increase in both stimulus utilization and introduced content. The increase in the use of characters and objects in the pictures was consistent with the pattern of training used as part of the methodology of this study. This was an area of importance due to its relationship to children's ability to categorize and make inferences (see page 8).

The change in the amount of introduced content was more evident than the changes in any other variable. Initially, no mother included more than one aspect of character not presented in the picture in her story, with the average score of less than one character or object introduced for each two stories (.47). In the post-test all mothers added at least one new aspect with an average of two per story. The

range on this variable was from one to 2.8 indicating that any one mother's score did not grossly increase the post-test mean.

The results, while highly tentative, indicate that for this group of mothers telling stories there were increases in three aspects of their language style; sentence length, stimulus utilization and introduced content. While previous research has concluded that these aspects of maternal linguistic functioning are related to children's thinking and learning, it now becomes necessary to test the hypotheses that following a program which enhances a mother's verbalizations, there will be a significant increase in her child's verbal functioning.

The children: As part of this pilot study, there was an attempt to evaluate the use of a number of tests to assess changes in the thinking and language styles of preschool ghetto youngsters. The overall conclusion from our first attempt is that we have failed in our quest for and use of appropriate instruments.

The attempt to find tests suitable for measuring the verbal abilities of this sample of preschool children present us with problems on two levels. The children studied here, at 3 and 4 years old, appeared to be too young for the scales which have been developed for other populations in the early school years and are geared to evaluating classroom performance and adjustment. The problem seemed to be that we were trying to measure verbal proficiency in a population which is known for verbal deficiencies. Most tests in this area have been standardized with children of middle-class parents who are different in terms of the need for verbal communication. With such children one measures the quality of an ability which is already present and developed to some degree. In the children of our population, it was necessary, in many cases to break through the habit of commanding attention and reaching others mostly by nonverbal means such as

gestures and physical contact. (Some of the children in class, when wanting a certain object, or a book to be read to them, would pull at the examiner's skirt or arm, point to the object and whine.) We were testing an area in which these children functioned poorest, and their apparent reluctance to exhibit their lack of skills hampered the administration of the tests.

Although the preschool center had been in operation for 2 or 3 years, it still had an atmosphere of hasty improvisation, with each room often serving more than one function and class. (This atmosphere was, to a large degree, due to the uncertainty of financial support from year to year.) This informality and flexibility had its advantages, however, in that the examiner was able to enter into the classrooms and to easily become part of the daily program. The examiner was able to hold the interest and cooperation of the teachers through informal chatting about the program and impressions of the children. The main disadvantages lay in the fact that the Center had to use all the space available and no room could be found which even approximated standard testing conditions. Therefore, testing was carried out in the kitchen (which was discontinued because the kitchen also served as the "cooling off" place for the more active children); the library (with no table suitable for children); the auditorium (with partitioned classrooms and offices); and the sewing room upstairs (often used by other groups). In addition, an important part of the classroom schedule called for three meals and one nap period every day.

Many of the problems, it seems, were inherent in the nature of the tests. The initial task was to find tests which would validly measure the abilities of these children. One of the tests which we attempted to use was a nonverbal test previously standardized on a group of children predominantly of middle-class background. This was

the Disc Placement Test (DPT), a form of downward extension of the Bender-Gestalt using the copying of designs by placing small magnetic discs on a metal board. While the originator of the DPT found it to be successful in his standardization group of the same age, the children of our mothers seemed not yet prepared to grasp the concepts involved. No explanation could clarify the meaning of "copy" to them; they could not compare their own work with the stimuli and perceive differences or similarities; and they could not correct, indeed, were not aware of their mistakes. They were not using the correct number of discs, nor able to copy the stimulus pattern. This test was removed from the battery since it took much time from the already too short attention span of the children, and yielded very limited results.

The Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Ability (ITPA), contained subtests which were unsuccessfully used as well. Subtests of the ITPA (i.e., Visual-Motor Sequencing and Vocal Encoding) each seemed too time-consuming or stressful to the children in proportion to the amount of information yielded. The Auditory-Vocal Automatic subtest did not always produce a valid measure because many children had very poor pronunciation which made it impossible to determine whether their responses were correct. The subtest, Auditory Decoding, produced scores equally difficult to interpret. The children quickly learned that the requirements of this test are only a yes or no answer, responding with a nod without showing comprehension of the question, or without listening. This type of behavior occurred more frequently in this subtest than on the others of the ITPA. It appears that since the stimulus is presented verbally and not pictorally, they have more difficulty comprehending the material.

The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test was the most easily administered, and appeared to be the most valid test of the entire battery.

There were two factors which somewhat slowed administration: The children were not able to focus on one page at a time when the book was spread open with both pages before them, so that each page had to be turned back with only the four relevant pictures opened to them; and the process was further slowed because almost all of the children insisted on naming all four pictures on the page. In spite of this, the Peabody attainment levels seem to be reasonable measures of their present level of vocabulary.

The Preschool Checklist was most difficult to administer. Many of the areas involved were beyond the level of even the older children in the group (e.g., number concepts) and therefore, more frustrating to them. Often when they showed disinterest, it was not known whether it was too difficult for them or that they were simply bored or distracted by something else.

Most of the children were asked to produce a drawing. This did not give any objective, quantifiable data in itself, but was helpful since it presented something that was both familiar and enjoyable to the child, thereby making the testing session more acceptable to him. These drawings also provided the examiner with several observations about the nature of the development of a child's scribblings into drawing and writing which may be useful in future programs.

A major problem in testing also lay with the nature of the population. The children's classroom attendance was generally spotty, children were admitted to or left the school in the middle of the term, or were out for weeks at a time with illnesses or hospitalizations. This disrupted the continuity of testing sessions and made it difficult or impossible to complete the battery in many cases. In the testing situation, the majority of the children displayed extremely short attention spans. It was necessary to have short periods of conversa-

tion between tests and to switch tests often. In this context, it was found that the children could switch their set very easily and showed no signs of perseveration from one test to another. Many of the children showed a low frustration tolerance and became fidgety at the more difficult, upper ends of the tests and insisted on returning to their classrooms. There were a number of children who displayed behavior to a degree which precluded testing or kept it to a minimum: Some were behavior problems in the classroom (e.g., numerous daily temper tantrums and continual crying), others were withdrawn and unable to respond to any encouragement. Of those who were able, and often seemed eager to engage in the testing procedure, there were some who exhibited a low amount and quality of verbalization. Their speech was low and mumbled, or when it was sufficiently loud to be heard, was slurred and difficult to comprehend. This may have impaired some of the examiner's rapport with the child during the testing session. Some children talked incessantly on a number of subjects, not necessarily related to the tests, while others were unable to respond verbally to direct questions.

Due to the above results and conclusions, it was felt that the methods and techniques used to assess these youngsters were inappropriate. Few performed at or above that expected on the basis of their chronological age. However much these findings reveal in terms of ability to respond to standardized task, they are not considered an adequate assessment of this sample.

IV. Tentative Conclusions, Implications for Mental Health and Future Plans:

It would seem likely that if an individual felt there was little she (or he) could do to affect her life or the lives of her children, that this perception would have a serious bearing upon her ability to

function effectively--that is, upon her mental health. If, in addition, society was providing programs which enhanced the functioning of her child, and was increasing "taking over" and replacing her as a mother, while ignoring her need to take some meaningful part in the training, (e.g., ignoring her need to be needed), then it is believed that the feeling of uselessness and alienation displayed by many ghetto mothers would tend to increase. A mother who has few of even the most rudimentary educational skills, increasingly finds herself unable to communicate with or to aid her child's learning and development.

This program was designed to develop and test methodology which might be useful in future clinical work with lower-class mothers as well as generate future research involving the impact of maternal communication upon child development. The conclusions drawn with reference to this group of lower-class mothers are that, for the most part, their ability to use the most elementary educational materials is extremely limited. Their lives are often quite barren and they have few individuals in their lives upon whom they feel they can depend. Many of these women are hungry for warm, human interaction, but are extremely anxious around others, and have some real difficulties relating to others.

The major implications of this study are that when therapeutic group activities are provided for the lower-class mothers, special techniques appear to be very helpful (if not essential) to motivate and to maintain interest. In this case, each mother's desire to affect the development of her child in some meaningful and socially valued manner seemed to provide the impetus necessary for the continued interest demonstrated. It appears that focusing upon the child and "ways you can help your child" rather than upon the problems of the mother is a useful means to approach a broad spectrum of psychological

dimensions. The value of the provision of an activity that is inherently interesting and which very quickly provides some level of skill is seen as an important, if not major, inclusion in programs for the lower class. In addition, the fact that the newly developed skill received feedback from the children (for the first time for some of the mothers they were able to maintain the attention of their child) appears to be suggestive that the technique developed is a useful one.

The purpose of mental health center programs is to help people to better cope with their world. Better coping necessitates greater skill to handle the problems one is faced with. Once the individual feels he can deal with his world in some effective manner, it is suggested that there will be associated a greater sense of well-being and mental health status.

Specifically, with respect to language style of the subject mothers presented, there was a clear increase in ability to use their imaginations as well as to describe material presented in a way which communicated to others. However, due to the nature of the social background of both mother and child, the assessment techniques used were, for the most part, inadequate to allow for a statistical analysis of change or the relationships of enhanced maternal language style and children's performance.

As a next step in the development of this project, more precise techniques and measurements will be devised for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of the relationship between mothers' language and children's language and thinking. The format of the program will be designed to replicate that described here with one major exception. Instead of a professional librarian leader, some of the mother "graduates" will be hired to lead the group. More time will be included for the measurement and development of mother-child interaction. Tasks

will be devised to provide information about how lower-class mothers actually do describe and "teach" their children. An attempt will be made to measure the degree to which a mother can capture and hold the child's attention and then to help the mother to gain skills which will enhance her ability to do so.

Proposed program: Two or three of the mothers' group graduates will be hired on a part-time basis. A refresher training program will be provided both to enhance their own skills and interest and to re-teach them the techniques described in this paper. Preschool books provided by the public library will be again used as the vehicle for skill development.

Mothers will be selected from the Get Set program. A major criterion for selection will be an educational level below 10th grade with first priority upon those with the least educational attainment. (At the present time we have been approached and have met with five different groups desiring this program. The two who best meet the above criterion will be selected.)

Each mother will be assessed using the CAT pictures. In addition, video-tape recordings will be made of the mother-child interaction prior to the program and at selected points during it. If possible, video tapes will be made of some of the training sessions.

An attempt will be made to gain some pre- and post-test measures of comparable mothers not selected. A further and more controlled attempt will be made to evaluate the functioning of the children. (A preliminary normative study has now been carried out with 200 Get Set youngsters, in which classroom behavior has been rated by the teacher. Assessment will be made of the classroom behavior of the new group of children.) Babysitters and lunch (or coffee and cake) will again be provided. Home visits will be made by the teacher mothers and

reminder letters sent to each member each week.

The goals of this program will be: 1) to enhance maternal linguistic style, 2) to provide the mothers with skills to be used to interact with their youngsters, 3) to assess the relationship between maternal language and that of the children, 4) to develop a feeling of belonging on the part of the mothers translated into an active "mothers' club," and 5) to develop "teachers" from each group who will provide the leadership for other groups.

Conclusion:

The purpose of the study was to create and assess techniques designed to enhance what we consider to be a significant aspect of mental health functioning -- verbal communication between the lower-class mother and her child. The rationale was that if mothers who are known to be deficient in communication skills could be trained to use preschool books as a vehicle for verbal interaction with their children, this would have a positive impact upon the language and thinking of the children. This paper described in detail the creation and evaluation of preliminary steps toward the development of such a training program. The "creation" of techniques was a first step. This is to be followed by a more controlled study of specific aspects of verbal interaction between mother and child and the effect of a training program for the mothers to enhance that interaction.

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APPENDIX

Simple picture books of various types

The Snowy Day - Ezra Jack Keats	A small Negro boy has fun outdoors in the snow.
Man Who Didn't Wash His Dishes - Phyllis Krasilovsky	When a man is too tired to wash his supper dishes, he finally resorts to ash trays, flower pots, etc.
Will I have A Friend? - Myra Cohen	First day at Nursery School
Whistle For Willie - Ezra Jack Keats	Peter, of the Snowy Day book, learns how to whistle for his dog.
A House for Everyone - Betty Miles	People live in many different kinds of houses.
Tale of Peter Rabbit - Beatrix Potter	Classic story of the little rabbit who almost got caught in Mr. MacGregor's garden.
Pretzel - Hans Rey	Pretzel, the Dachshound marries Greta and they raise a family.
Curious George - Hans Rey	How a curious monkey got into trouble.
Nothing Ever Happens on My Block - Elene Raskin	A small, bored boy misses all the excitement on his block.
Harry, the Dirty Dog - Gene Zion	A small white dog gets so dirty that his family doesn't recognize him.
A Zoo for Mister Muster - Arnold Lobel	When Mr. Muster cannot visit the zoo, the animals come to the apartment.
Come to the Farm Come to the Zoo - Tensen	Large photographs show farm and zoo animals - easy text.
Little Red Hen - Tony Palazzo	None of the barnyard animals would help the little red hen plant her grain.
Nobody Listens to Andrew - Elizabeth Guilfoyle	No one will believe that there is a bear in Andrew's bedroom.
Big Brother - Charlotte Zolotow	A big brother teases his small sister.
Let's Be Enemies - Janice Udry	Children fight and then make up.
Excuse Me, Certainly - Louis Slobodkin	How to be polite.

Peter's Chair - Ezra Jack Keats	A new baby in the family causes jealousy.
Nursery Rhymes - Marguerite de Angeli Just Around the Corner - Leland Jacobs The Moon and A Star - Myra Livingston	Easy poetry about everyday things

LEARNING BOOKS

These books were intended to give the mothers some idea of how small children can learn ABC's, numbers. colors, sizes, shapes, etc. through text and illustrations.

A B C - Bruno Munari	Brilliant colors and large familiar objects for each letter of the alphabet.
Hullaboo ABC - Beverly Cleary	Bright colors - objects found around any house.
A B C's - Brian Wildsmith 1 2 3's	Vivid colors show mondernistic design.
Counting Carnival - Ziner	Learning to count.
What is Red? - Beatrix Gottlieb	Learning colors.
Little blue and Little Yellow - Leo Lionni	How blue and yellow can become green - relationship of colors.
Are You Square - Leonard Kessler Square as a House Everything has a Shape Everything has a Size - Myra Kohn	Relationship of sizes and shapes.

To use imagination and word power

Katy No Pocket - Emmy Payne	A mother kangaroo who has no pocket to carry her baby in goes in search of one.
Keep Your Mouth Closed Dear! - Aliki	A small alligator swallows everything in sight - much to the dismay of his parents. A vacuum cleaner finally helps clear out his stomach.
Make Way for Ducklings - Robert McCloskey	A mallard and his mate search for a place to raise their ducklings City of Boston is the setting for this story - and a home is finally found in the Boston Public Gardens.